

## ILLAWARRA'S EARLY BUILDINGS: THE OLD MERCURY OFFICE AND SUNNYBANK

Our Society receives a constant stream of enquiries from all manner of people from all manner of places. Replies involve a lot of work, which of course is not begrudged; but sometimes the result is extremely rewarding.

An instance of this was a recent request from the National Trust to identify an old cottage at Wollongong. Council members present were at a loss, largely because the long, bungalow style was so very typical of the period. It might almost have been anywhere. So there was no easy answer; research, as always, was called for.

One thought was that it could have been Sunnybank, a lovely old home at the Cross Roads, near where Mount Keira Road branches off from Crown Street West, Wollongong. Like so many of our old homes, this was demolished by the Government of the day, probably just before the outbreak of Hitler's War, to provide grounds for West Wollongong Public School. Regrettably, no picture of this house could be found for verification purposes, and other means had to be resorted to. Enquiries amongst those who could recall Sunnybank—all unfortunately, rather vaguely—indicated that it had "iron lace" verandah posts, and no dormer window. Therefore it followed that this was not the house shown in the picture.

What then? At the Council meeting several possibilities were floated; amongst them was that the subject could have been the old Mercury office in Market Square which stood directly opposite the Society's Museum. And so it turned out to be. John Rae's drawing of Market Square in 1851 (a copy of which is displayed in the Museum) shows that the building was already erected by that year.

A photograph of about 1890 shows it as the Mercury office, though by then a door had been placed in a splayed corner of the building right on the street corner, and windows installed like an old-fashioned shop. This, doubtless, was then the newspaper office, the printery being in other parts, because the name of the paper was sign-written on the beams across the top of the verandah formed by what seem to have been wooden columns. The **Mercury** moved from there to its new office at the south-western corner of Crown and Kembla Streets in 1910. The old building remained until it was demolished, probably in the 1920s.

Meanwhile, the drawing, which was the subject of the query addressed to the Society, had been done. It is dated 1913, and is called simply "Old Cottage, Wollongong." But here is where the bonus for the Society comes in: the drawing was done by no less an artist than Hardy Wilson, whose monumental work, **Old Colonial Architecture in N.S.W. and Tasmania** (1924), contributed to the study and appreciation of our early architectural heritage probably more than any other single work. His drawing of this important old building does not appear in his book, but it is pleasing to know that the original is now in the National Library, Canberra.

Which takes care of the memory of that part of our beginnings. But has anyone a picture of Sunnybank? The Society would be indeed pleased to acquire a copy.

—Edgar Beale.